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ABSTRACT

One of the exciting and sometimes frustrating elements of participating in the field of outdoor wilderness education and recreation involves not only the issue of ensuring that practicing professionals function with competence, safety and prudence, but that they have knowledge and skills gained from many disciplines and a variety of life experiences. The issue of outdoor wilderness recreation leadership has become a national concern both within the profession and from organizations employing outdoor program services. One of the keys in solving this problem lies in approaching the issue not from the point of view of developing a "certification" but rather developing some tools that will enhance our ability to reasonably "document experiences" of outdoor leaders. While a number of professional, state, and educational organizations/agencies have addressed the issue of certification to require basic competency levels, there should be a variety of schools, programs, or courses that work to provide potential leaders with the education and experiences that will "document" their level of experience. This documentation must come from a variety of sources, including courses taken, certifications held, job and life experiences, and recommendations from practicing professionals. (LRL)

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OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP CERTIFICATION

DOCUMENTATION OF EXPERIENCE OR LIMITATION OF FREEDOM

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[1985]

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One of the exciting and at times frustrating elements of participating in the field of Outdoor Wilderness Education and Recreation involves the issues of ensuring that the practicing professionals function with competence, safety, and prudence. There is no doubt that camp directors, program supervisors and adminstrators need competent and qualified people in charge of their outdoor adventure programs: they all want skilled, safe and knowledgeable staff. Whether you are a parent sending your child to a camp that offers adventure-based programming, a student enrolled in a stress challenge course or the director of a therapeutic wilderness based program for troubled youth, you have a concern about the quality of the staff who lead these programs. Are the leaders knowledgeable and competent enough to provide a safe and enjoyable experience? Do they meet the minimum qualifications to handle such positions as adventure educator, canoe guide, ropes course instructor or rockclimbing specialists? And what would those qualifications *be*, specifically?

As a practicing professional who leads wilderness trips and teaches in a Bachelors Degree Program focusing on the training and education of outdoor wilderness leaders, I constantly address the question of how best to prepare students to become competent professionals.

The past decade has seen extraordinary growth in the use of the outdoors for educational, recreational and human services programs. Consumer spending is a good expression of

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this demand.

Nationally, leisure expenditures have grown from $58 billion in 1965 to an all time high of $180 billion or one out of every eight dollars accounted for in personal consumer spending in 1978.(1) In 1981 the Outdoor Recreation Policy Review Group indicated that leisure expenditures had grown to $244 billion in consumer spending!(2)

"Whatever the measure, money spent, participation or time spent, it is clear that the demand for many forms of outdoor recreation has grown during the two decades since the ORRRC and at a much faster pace than ORRRC predicted that it would."
Outdoor Recreation For America-1983. An Assessment twenty years after the report of the Outdoor Recreation Resource Review Commission.(p. 19.)

As the demand for outdoor activities increases there develops a need for highly skilled outdoor leaders, professionals who must have knowledge and skills gained form many disciplines and a variety of life experiences.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate this would be to give you an example of what is required of the instructors we hire for our summer wilderness program at Unity College.

We have been offering a summer wilderness program for the past three years with a staff of 10 to 16 people. We offer three distinct courses and operate a high and low ropes course which is located on the college campus. The ropes courses are an integral part of all the summer courses as well as being utilized by local summer camps and human services organizations who contract with us.

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The first of the summer courses we offer is a series of two-week-long backpacking/canoeing/rockclimbing courses for troubled youth (female/male) ages 11-16. The focus of these courses is to provide youths who have family, school, court or drug related problems the opportunity to develop a better self image, achieve success,and learn new skills as well as to get away from their home environment.

During these courses, the instructors spend a lot of time teaching skills as well as facilitating group problem-solving activities.

The second series of courses we offer are week-long,adventure based canoeing and camping courses for women: a course for mothers and daughters, one for women over 30 and one open to women of any age. These courses are primarily recreational in nature; however, many women experience them as a rite of passage, and the instructor must be able to support the participants' processing of these experiences.

The third series of courses are week-long canoeing trips in northern Maine for people 62 years of age and older: Elderhostel. Elderhostel is a combination of recreational and educational activities in which the participants canoe and learn minimum impact camping techniques while studying the history of the northern Maine logging industry.

Each of the staff that we hire must be able to teach specialized outdoor recreational skills, have well-developed communication and leadership skills, be competent in safety and first aid, and understand specific characteristics of the people they work with, such as age-group traits and

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developmental levels. Further, these leaders need to be able to observe interpersonal relationships in order to communicate and solve problems within their groups.

Hiring a competent leader is perhaps one of the most important aspects in conducting outdoor programs, yet this topic has had little attention. Dr. Larry Buell in his book Outdoor Leadership Competency, states:

"Leadership is the single most critical aspect of conducting Outdoor Programs. Specifically, there is a need to reassess the demands of Outdoor Leadership and to improve its quality and quantity."(3)

The issue of outdoor wilderness education and leadership has become a national concern both within the profession and from organizations employing outdoor program services. The low status given Outdoor Leadership is one of the problems which Meire, Morash and Welton express in the preface to their book, High Adventure OutdoorPursuits:Organization and Leadership:

'Some aspects, such as programming, have received extensive amounts of exposure in the literature, and others, such as leadership have received very little. The past ten years have seen much written on the philosophy of high adventure programs but the 'state of the art' has neither investigated various models on leadership and supervision, nor discussed administrative and management problems."(4)

Perhaps one of the keys to solving this problem may lie in approaching the issue not from the point of view of developing a "Certification" but rather developing some tools that will enhance our ability to reasonably *document the experience* of outdoor leaders. Presently we have a number of de facto certification schemes, courses and experiences that most organizations utilize to screen and hire staff (see

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Figure 1). Some of these are useful tools; others are vague. Yet we do use them and do not consider most of them unreasonable in terms of assessing experience or minimum skill level.

Besides the groups listed in Figure 1, there are several other groups here in the United States that are addressing the certification issue:

American Professional Mountain Guide Association

APMGA has a certification program for perspective guides that includes documentation of prior experience, recommendation from other professionals, and the ability to verify competence in three guiding areas: rock,ice/snow and ski mountaineering.

Wilderness Education Association

This National Standard Program for Outdoor Leadership Certification is a 5-week program that addresses the issue of ensuring competency through participation in a field course that covers "the basic experience and judgement necessary to plan, execute and disband a wilderness trip while still conserving the environment."

Association for Experiential Education

AEE developed "Accepted Peer Practices in Adventure Programming" which is a a reference guide to the common practices of adventure programs in North America. Their goal is to "raise the level of safety, environmental awareness and quality in outdoor adventure education programs by compilation and dissemination of common practices."

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State Programs

Various states have camp trip leader certification programs that are short, one- to three-day courses that cover topics related to the safety and care of the clients and the environment. Usually leaders must pass a written exam to document their knowledge and minimum competency.

Presently there are many approaches to the problem of ensuring that we have competent Outdoor Leaders, and we *should* have a variety of approaches to this complex issue.

Outward Bound and NOLS have done a tremendous job in developing outdoor education and leadership. The Wilderness Education Assocaiation has a developed one of the best introductory curriculums covering the basic knowledge and skills for outdoor leadership. The Association for Experiential Education has done a tremendous service in providing us with a comprehenive guide for the adminstration of outdoor adventure programs. And the various state agencies that require basic competency levels have helped to insure that we have more knowledgeable leaders.

There are agreed areas of competency for Outdoor Leadership and programming and with that information there should be a variety of schools, programs or courses that work to provide potential leaders with the education and experiences that will "document" their level of experience.

Documentation of experience must come from a variety of sources,including courses taken, certifications held, job and life experiences and recommendations from practicing

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professionals.

Certification of Outdoor Leaders can become a limitation of one's freedom if we do not utilize all the resources we have available in which to document experience.

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FIGURE 1

CERTIFICATION SCHEMES,OR COURSES UTILIZED TO DOCUEMENT EXPERIENCE LEVELS OF POTENTIAL INSTURCTORS

American National Red Cross-
Assorted courses in First Aid instruction,canoeing and kayaking, swimming/lifesaving. Examples: Advanced Lifesaving,Advanced First Aid Certification.

American Heart Association-
C.P.R. course.

American Camping Association-
Leadership training courses.

National Scouting Programs-
Leadership training courses.

American Canoe Association-
Specific skill and safety courses.

National Outdoor Leadership School-
Specific leadership training courses.

Outward Bound Schools-
Specific leadership training courses.

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FOOTNOTES

(1). "Leisure: Where no recession is in sight", U.S. News and World Report, Vol. LXXXVI, No.2 (Jan 15, 1979).pp41-44.

(2). Diamond,Henry L., Castle,Emery N., Coleman,Sheldon., Mott,William Penn., Noonan,Patrick F., Reilly,William F., Rockefller,Laurance S. Outdoor Recreation For America-1983-An assessment twenty years after the report of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission. Resources for the Future ,Inc. 1755 Massachusetts Ave, N.W. Washington D.C. 20036. 1983, p.19

(3). Buell, Larry. Outdoor Leadership Competency: A manual self-asessment and staff evaluation. Environmental Awareness Publishers, P.O. Box 990 Greenfiels Ma. 1983, p.2

(4). Meier, Joel, Morash, Talmage W., Welton,George. High Adventure Outdoor Pursuits : Organization and Leadership. Salt Lake City,Utah Brighton Pub.,1980.

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